

Chapter 3 Another Alpha

9-11 minutes

Freya

I was nursing my second whiskey when my phone lit up with Elena's name flashing across the screen. Three weeks since I'd walked out of Stone Lake Tower, and the world hadn't stopped turning. Funny how that works.

"Where are you hiding, you beautiful disaster?" Her voice spilled through the speaker, familiar and warm like summer rain.

I couldn't help but smile. "My apartment. Where else would I be?"

"Unacceptable. I'm standing outside your door. Let me in before your neighbors think I'm stalking you."

The line went dead before I could respond. Sure enough, seconds later, a rapid knock echoed through my apartment. I opened the door to find Elena Kane—Jasper's sister and my best friend since college—standing there with two overnight bags and a determined glint in her eyes.

[comment](#)

"You flew back from Paris?" I gasped as she pushed past me into the apartment.

Elena dropped her bags dramatically on my floor and spun around, her blonde hair whipping around her shoulders. "You quit the pack, slapped my brother across his stupid face, and thought I wouldn't hop on the first flight back?" She pulled me into a fierce hug. "Eight years of your life, Freya. Eight years."

"Elena—"

"No." She pressed her finger against my lips. "No sad faces. We're going out. You've been cooped up in here doing what? Crying? Planning world domination?"

I sighed. "Just... processing."

Elena surveyed my apartment—the empty wine bottles, the stack of resignation paperwork, the half-eaten takeout containers. "Well, you've processed enough. Get dressed. We're hitting Crescent Moon."

"The nightclub? I don't think—"

"Not a request." She was already rummaging through my closet. "You need tequila, dancing, and possibly a deliciously bad decision with a handsome stranger."

Two hours later, we were ensconced in a corner booth at Crescent Moon, the bass pulsing through my bones as Elena pushed another shot toward me.

"To freedom," she declared, lifting her glass.

I clinked mine against hers. "To not giving a damn anymore."

The tequila burned pleasantly down my throat. Elena watched me with that piercing gaze so similar to her brother's, yet infinitely warmer.

"You know," she said, leaning forward, "I always thought Jasper would wake up one morning and realize what was right in front of him." She shook her head. "Then that Mia person shows up again, and suddenly my brother turns into this... puppet."

My chest tightened at the mention of his name. "It's the mate bond, Elena. You can't fight nature."

"Bullshit." She slammed her glass down. "Mate bond or not, he shouldn't have treated you like disposable garbage. You ran that pack better than he did half the time."

"He's still your brother," I reminded her, though the defense felt hollow even to my own ears.

"And that's why I can say with absolute authority that he's an idiot." Her eyes sparkled with mischief. "You should see what's happening at Stone Lake now. Complete chaos. Timothy's trying to hold things together, but no one knows where anything is, Jasper's schedule is a disaster, and Mia—" she rolled her eyes dramatically, "—keeps trying to redecorate the executive floor in pastels."

Despite everything, a laugh bubbled up in my throat. "Pastels? In Jasper's office?"

"Pink and mint green," Elena confirmed with wicked glee. "She says the current decor is 'too aggressive and masculine.'"

We dissolved into giggles, and for a moment, it felt like old times—before I'd fallen for Jasper, before everything had gotten so complicated.

"I still can't believe you're actually done with Stone Lake," Elena said, her voice softening. "I mean, I'm proud of you, but... it was your home."

I twirled the lime in my empty glass. "It stopped being home when I realized I was just convenient. Useful until I wasn't." My wolf stirred restlessly inside me, still mourning the loss of pack bonds. "What about you? How long are you staying before jetting back to Paris?"

Elena's expression shifted, something secretive dancing in her eyes. "About that... I'm not going back. At least, not as a Stone Lake wolf."

My jaw dropped. "What?"

"I'm filing withdrawal papers too," she announced, a defiant tilt to her chin. "I've been thinking about it for months. I hate pack politics, all those stuffy meetings and traditions. I want to paint, travel, live on my own terms." She grabbed my hand. "And now that you've gone and shown it can be done..."

"Elena, your family—"

"Is not my whole identity." She squeezed my fingers. "Besides, it's not like I'm the first. Loads of wolves live independently now. The whole 'lone wolf dies but the pack survives' thing is so last century."

I stared at her in shock. "Does Jasper know?"

"Not yet." A wicked smile curved her lips. "Maybe I'll just send him a text. 'Hey bro, following Freya's lead. P.S. Your mate's a bitch.'"

"Elena!" I gasped, but couldn't stop laughing.

"What?" She feigned innocence. "Am I wrong? The woman treats everyone like servants. Can you imagine her as Luna? The pack will revolt within a month."

The thought of Mia as Luna—the female Alpha, the pack mother—sent a fresh stab of pain through my chest. For years, I'd secretly dreamed of standing beside Jasper in that role.

Elena must have seen the shadow cross my face because she quickly steered us back to lighter territory. "Enough about Stone Lake. We're celebrating new beginnings." She clinked her glass against mine again. "To freedom and fabulous futures."

"To freedom," I echoed, feeling lighter than I had in days.

As the night progressed, Elena's presence worked its magic. We danced until our feet ached, laughed until our sides hurt, and for hours, I didn't think about Stone Lake or Jasper or the void left behind.

"You know what you need?" Elena shouted over the music as we took a breather at the bar. "A palette cleanser."

I raised an eyebrow. "A what?"

"A man," she clarified, scanning the crowd like a predator. "Someone hot, uncomplicated, and preferably nothing like my brother."

"Elena—"

"Don't 'Elena' me. When was the last time you were with someone who wasn't... him?" She knew better than to say Jasper's name too many times; it was like summoning a demon.

I took another sip of my drink, avoiding her gaze. The truth was, there hadn't been anyone else. Not in eight years.

"That's what I thought," she said triumphantly. "Oh! What about him?"

I followed her gaze to a tall figure leaning against the bar. Even from a distance, I could tell he was gorgeous—dark wavy hair, broad shoulders, and a confident stance that screamed Alpha. But it was his scent that hit me next—rich, woodsy, with notes of cedar and something wild that made my wolf suddenly alert.

"He's an Alpha," I murmured, surprised I could detect his status from this distance.

Elena wiggled her eyebrows. "Even better. Show Jasper you've upgraded."

"I'm not looking to make a statement."

"Then don't. Just have fun." She gave me a gentle nudge. "Go talk to him. What's the worst that could happen?"

As if sensing our attention, the stranger turned. His eyes—a startling shade of amber—locked with mine across the room. The corner of his mouth lifted in a slow, appreciative smile that sent heat rushing through my veins.

"Go," Elena insisted. "I'll be right here if you need an extraction."

Before I could overthink it, I found myself walking toward him. My wolf, usually so cautious, urged me forward with unexpected enthusiasm.

"You look like a woman who knows what she wants," he said as I approached, his voice a low rumble that vibrated through me.

I lifted my chin. "And what makes you think that?"

"The way you walked over here. Confident. Direct." His eyes traveled down my body and back up, not bothering to hide his appreciation. "I'm Silvano."

Silvano Moretti, Alpha of the Shadow Pack. I'd heard his name long before I ever came to New York. One of the leading Alphas in all of America, his wealth was staggering, but his scandals were even louder. His face appeared in interviews with Hollywood starlets almost weekly. To many she-wolves, he was the dream lover they fantasized about at night.

My father had once warned me that Silvano Moretti was the most dangerous man in the world. But maybe the alcohol was burning away my good sense, because I didn't want to care. The temptation of sharing a night with this untouchable Alpha was too strong.

"Freya," I replied, not offering my last name or pack affiliation. Tonight, I was just Freya—no titles, no obligations.

"Beautiful name for a beautiful woman." He stepped closer, and his scent enveloped me—stronger now, intoxicating. "Can I buy you a drink, Freya?"